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by

REV. JOHN BERNARD KELLY

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Our Lady of Fatima*

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REV. JOHN BERNARD KELLY



COSMOPOLITAN America's interest in the story of Lourdes as presented by Franz Werfels "to magnify the divine mystery and holiness of man," is a welcome forecast of the acclaim that may one day greet a like best-seller presenting equally memorable events that transpired in Fatima, Portugal, twenty-six years ago. The Vatican's May 1942 release of the official record, when the reigning Pope Pius XII dedicated all war-stricken humanity to Our Lady of Fatima's Immaculate Heart, can merely be intimated in this limited presentation of the momentous events attested.

It was Our Blessed Lady's month of May in 1917 (the 13th, to be exact) that ten year old Lucia Santo, who is a nun

*Pronounced: FAT'IMA.

today, was murmuring the Rosary with her two cousins amid a flock of sheep that grazed upon a plateau in Fatima, a town about 75 miles from Lisbon. At noon of this thirteenth day the heavens suddenly opened to reveal a beautiful Lady to the fascinated eyes of the trio.

Seven-year old Jacinto Marto and her eight-year old brother Francisco were one with Lucia in symbolizing war-torn, bewildered humanity at prayer for the dawn of peace with justice. Symbolically, too, the three children were a miniature mirror of the Blessed Trinity's devotion to the Mother of the Prince of Peace, being one in transported love of the unknown Lady's celestial beauty. "Be not afraid, my little ones," she said in the tone of the one Maiden in whose gladsome voice is also the soothing assurance of a mother.

Visible to the three, only the girls heard her voice, and to Lucia alone was it given to converse with her. She thrilled them with the assurance that she had just come from the heaven of their dreams to tell them the secret of obtaining and maintaining peace on earth. It would take six lessons to im-

part the story in full: she would come to them on the thirteenth day of the next five months, the last being October, the month of the Rosary. They could then tell all she said to their sad-eyed Holy Father, Benedict XV, who was weeping on the Vatican Hill as he echoed His divine Master's words: "Hadst thou known—and that in this day, the things that are to thy peace!" With an *au revoir* until June 13th, she retired into the invisible.

The folks at home received the account of the Lady's visit with indulgent scepticism. Nevertheless, they went with the children and a few intimate friends to meet the unknown Lady on June 13th. At noon, the Lady again captured and held the gaze of the three for about twelve minutes of mysterious conference. After this second visit they reported to their parish priest the Lady's plea to them to give good example by saying the Rosary more attentively and devoutly, always adding at the end of each decade the words: "Dear Jesus, forgive us our trespasses!" When the local clergy insinuated with kindness that they were probably imagining all they reported, the children assured their

mentors that the Lady had promised to present a great miracle in the skies of October that would convince the world of their truthfulness.

After a month of heckling and persecution by the village authorities, many of whom were disciples of newborn Communism, the three children kept their July thirteenth tryst with the Lady. Five thousand people, mostly curiosity-seekers, saw the little ones at the stroke of noon come to the same rapt and concerted attention as before. After twelve minutes of communing they reported the Lady as saying that a worse war would follow the one then in progress (World War I) and that the spectacle promised for October 13th would do much to teach its beholders God's solution of the peace problem. She said that all the world, including atheistically dominated Russia, could be brought to practice the true faith by the faithful offering up their Rosary daily for that intention. The more the world learned of the love for everybody that throbs in her own maternal heart, the more they would want to be members of her great world-family that goes on through the ages, and in Heaven. Her

motherly chats with the little ones always left the impression that as the world had been one in the common belief in one God, Whom it calls Father, so would mankind be strengthened in that unity by permitting the hand of the Mother that rocked the cradle of the Prince of Peace, to rule its heart with the Father.

Years later, when Lucia was a professed nun, her report of the July meeting was given in more detail. "The present war will cease," the Lady had said, "only to begin again in the next Pontificate when there will be a more terrible conflict begetting famine, persecution of the faithful and the Pope. Many nations will be martyred. It is my Son's wish that the world be consecrated to my Immaculate Heart to avert such dire calamities. He wishes the faithful to receive Holy Communion on the first Saturday, as on the First Friday of each month, for the triumph of truth and the conversion of Russia."

In August the children were kidnapped by the local police, so that they

could not keep their appointment with the Lady on the 13th. Nevertheless, about eighteen thousand persons on the scene of the tryst were given a preview of the promised October pageant when a flash of lightning burst from a clear sky and overshadowed the noontide sun. Immediately popular clamor obtained the children's release after the trio had undergone a cruel inquisition. Gruelling threats had failed to change their individual and concerted reports of the miraculous happenings to date. Moreover, their ingenuousness gave evidence of God's wisdom in making the three little ones His Blessed Mother's confidants. It was becoming clearer that their juvenile minds could not conceive these startling statements without divine assistance.

On August 19th the children met the Lady at Valentos. Again she told them of the Rosary's mission: to present daily the life of the Holy Family to the learned and illiterate who, as they gradually learned to know her through meditation on its mysteries, would want to

be children of the one Blessed Mother, as they already were of the Eternal Father.

Promptly at noon of September 13th the thirty thousand people present saw a sudden dimout of the sun, followed by a swirling globe of light which just as suddenly dispelled the resultant gloom. A shower of mysterious objects said to resemble illuminated petals of roses fell from the sky. Investigators, given full approval of the Church and state, attest that the globes of light, visible to the thousands present, were not to be identified as units of the solar system.

All Portugal was tense when the great day arrived, October 13th, that would settle the question of the children's veracity and soundness of mind. The little trio appeared to be all but nonchalant as they emerged from under the trees in their newly consecrated pastureland. While they were murmuring their Rosary word was spread among the seventy-five thousand people crowded into the environs of the village that

the children were in person-to-person communication with the Lady. The Mediatrix of Heaven pointed to the sky where, as the secular press of Portugal reported it, a sun that seemed at first a dull silver disc gradually threw out immeasurable waves of rainbow hues for ten minutes. The spellbound thousands were moved to a mingling of astonishment, terror, and trembling prayer for an interpretation of what the people for the most part now believed to be a miracle."

There are preserved today in the files of "Illustrada Portuguesa" and many other Lisbon news organs, action photographs of the startling scene. One descriptive line in the Ecclesiastical Commission's official report reads: "Thousands saw the Monarch of the stars doing homage to the Queen of heaven." It intimates its own interpretation of the supernatural message given when it refers to the coincidence of the promised and inexplicable display of nature in the year now accepted as Communism's birth. Only a few years had elapsed

when Pius XI wrote in his encyclical on Communism: "This modern revolution has actually broken out or threatens everywhere. It exceeds in amplitude and violence anything yet experienced in preceding persecutions of the Church. Entire peoples find themselves falling back into barbarism."

The reader is undoubtedly wondering why this amazing record of contemporary miracles, so vitally significant to this age, has not been given to the world at large years ago. The answer may be found in the established policy of the Roman Catholic Church that ascertains the truth of the last detail involved in claiming the miraculous character of any event or personal experience before committing itself officially to its credibility. The Portuguese hierarchy appointed a committee of scholars to investigate the matter five years after the event, the intervening period being given to the study of it as an historical occurrence. Only ten years after the apparitions was the first national pilgrimage endorsed by the same body. The

Portuguese nation was officially dedicated to Our Lady of Fatima fifteen years after the story broke.

It was our blessed privilege personally to hear Archbishop Cicognani, the present Papal Delegate to America, report the unlike devotion of the present Pontiff, Pius XII, to the Immaculate Heart of Mary, and her message to the world through the children of Fatima. It was no coincidence, therefore, but further proof of his devotion, that on the occasion of the Silver Jubilee of his own elevation to the episcopacy, May 13, 1942, that he placed the warring world officially under the protection of Our Lady of Fatima.

Archbishop Finbar Ryan's scholarly account of Our Lady's appearances in Fatima* is confirmed by official releases from the Vatican in the last few years. In these days of atheistic propaganda so destructive to the ideals of childhood and youth, it is inspiring to study the

*Our Lady of Fatima, by Msgr. Finbar Ryan, O.P., B. Herder Book Co., St. Louis, Mo.

truth and beauty of contemporary revelations declaring humanity's kinship with the divine King of Kings through His Immaculate Mother and the divine Flesh and Blood shared with man in the Eucharist. It was with Saint Joseph and her Divine Son that Our Lady appeared in her final visit to the children. In accordance with this setting was the contemporary plea of Pope Benedict XV: "May all men, children of the same Father in Heaven, greet each other as brothers. We charge you, Lord Cardinal (Gasparri), to communicate to all the bishops of the world our ardent desire that recourse be made to the Heart of Jesus, the throne of grace, and that to this throne recourse be made through Mary."

Pope Pius XII today echoes his predecessor's words of 1917: "The law of God is neglected and the Christian conscience is weakening, and in many places faith is languishing. There is a growing violence in class warfare. The abominable tenets of Communism are being propagated. The defense of the family is in the Rosary." It is the love

of the perfect Mother that inspires the heart to virtue and reinforces the world unity in religion that is born of monotheism's compelling call.

Militancy today is showing marked signs in Christian nations of returning to the standard of the Crusaders. Womanhood, especially, must not be brutalized by contact with the primitive demands of war. But to avoid divorce of Christian ideals from service to God in the home there must be an hourly inspiration. *Meditation on the historic epic of Our Lady of Fatima and daily recitation of the Rosary is the answer.*

Let all, therefore, attentively and devoutly murmur the Rosary's true story in our churches and homes so that the globe may be one great white expanse in which there are no dividing lines, national or racial—a world that is a white Christmas perpetuating childhood's laughter, with the nations ruled by Wise Men bowing down before the Infant King of Kings, the Divine Subject of Joseph and Mary of the Immaculate Heart.

SUMMARY

The final summing up of the major features in the official account of Our Lady of Fatima's six appearances in the world, so recent that one of the principals is still living in a convent in Portugal, is as follows:

¶ Portugal's outstanding record of devotion to the Mother of God made that "Land of Mary" a natural selection for the Fatima appearances.

¶ The Prince of Peace conveyed the secret of permanent peace on earth through His Blessed Mother who reminded our contemporary world that just as the self-evident doctrine of one God, the Father, did more than any other Truth to unify humanity's all but universal, intellectual assent, so the consecration of mankind's universal love of motherhood is the most direct reinforcement of that unity. Hence, the universal Mother appeared in person to remind groping humanity that she, the Mother of God, offers her heart to all who will accept it in exchange for their own.

¶ To reveal her nearness to Time and her heart's personal concern for contemporary conditions, she presents the antidote to the Russian rulers' evident determination to breed world atheism.

¶ To three devout children repeating their Rosary

and symbolizing her Child teaching His elders in the Temple She counsels and promises: "So that all mankind may know who I am even as you do, now that I have revealed myself as the Lady of the Rosary, let them study the life of the Holy Family by daily meditating the mysteries of the Rosary they recite. . . . I shall give evidence of my Divine Son's readiness to exercise His omnipotence at my request even as He did at Cana. I shall have Him present a miracle on October 13, 1917 at noon which will convince all who exercise their reason that a Mother's heartfelt prayers rule the Sacred Heart, and must rule all mankind's hearts as the Father rules their minds."

¶ The spectacle, termed "a phenomenon" by the secular press, is now an officially attested miracle. The revolving globe of light symbolizes the Divine Source of all knowledge. The downpour of rain, gradually dispelled as a rainbow arched the sky, is symbolic of the blackout of war with its hail of death-dealing missiles followed by the sign of peace coming through prayer. The appearances to the children of their Blessed Mother and Saint Joseph, representative of the Father, and the Prince of Peace as Child and Man, while seventy-five thousand spectators beheld the miraculous pageant in the sky, is convincing evidence of the Divine Desire to convert all humanity into one great holy Family through the Eucharist and the Rosary.

